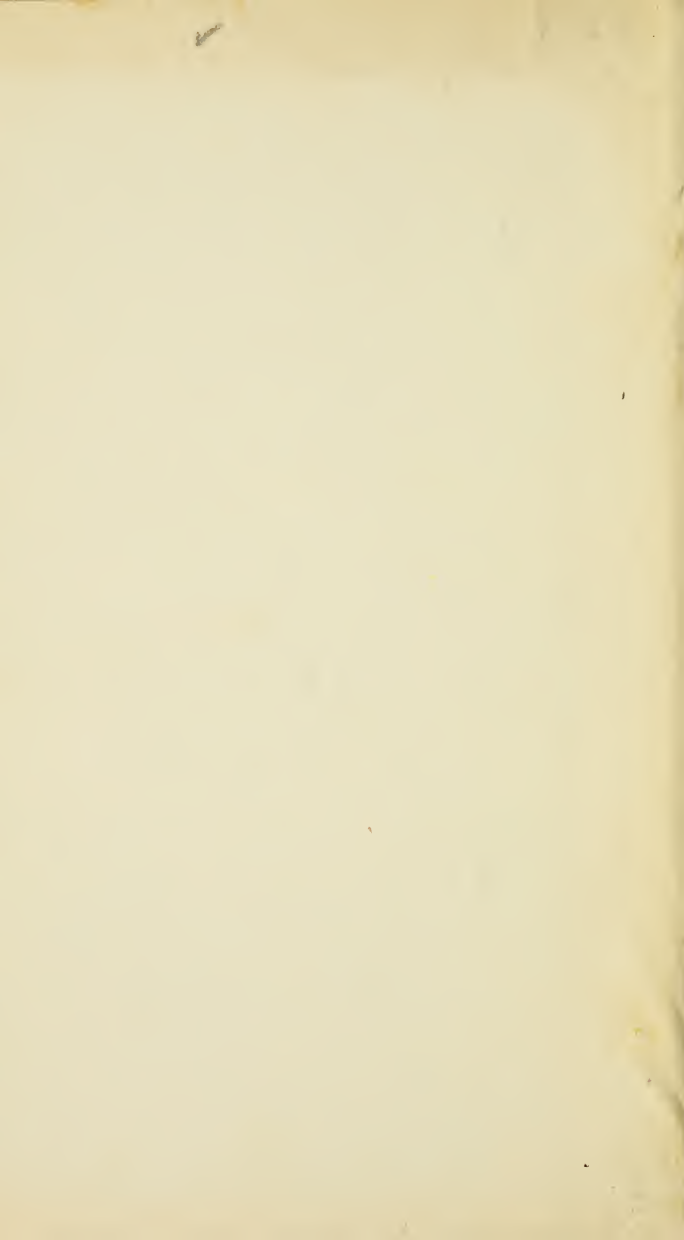


MADGE LINSEY
AND OTHER POEMS
DORA SIGERSON SHORTER

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MADGE LINSEY
AND OTHER POEMS

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MADGE LINSEY
AND OTHER POEMS
DORA SIGERSON SHORTER A

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

“THE COLLECTED POEMS OF
DORA SIGERSON SHORTER,”
with an Introduction by
GEORGE MEREDITH

“THE TROUBADOUR AND OTHER
POEMS.”

“THROUGH WINTRY TERRORS”:
A Novel.

“NEW POEMS.”

“DO-WELL AND DO-LITTLE”:
A Fairy Story.

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MADGE LINSEY, OR THE THREE SOULS

MADGE LINSEY at the well raised the deep waters,
Brimmed her brass bucket full, went from her
place.

Loose hung her collar her full throat exposing,
Rough fell her silken hair, sullen her face.

Went down the village street jauntily singing,
Knowing well women's tongues rang to her song ;
Knowing men's greedy eyes pierced her thin
garments—

Poised she the bucket high, young she and strong.

Nature has laid on the wild hare and red fox
A scent for the hound lest he lose them in chase,
So for her sport may they fly hill and hollow,
And weaponless fall at the end of the race,

MADGE LINSEY

She on Madge Linsey laid rich and soft beauty
So the hot thought of her leapt to men's brain ;
Had she awoke in a lady's lace cradle
This her destroyer were but her sweet gain.

Had she a mother to point her path softly !
Had she a sister to laugh by her side !
In some good way had life's mysteries come to
her
Girded her modesty, wakened her pride.

But, as the young dog who greets the world
kindly
Learns in the sullen street anger or ear,
Found she the strength of her youth and her
beauty,
If women were merciless men held her dear.

Had her old father but stayed in his reaping
One summer day to uplift from the ground
Some stricken bloom he had slain in his passing
On his child's mind some sure light he had found.

MADGE LINSEY

Glad had the lissome plant sprang to its promising
Leapt straight to heaven's glow, delicate green,
Spoilt now each tender bud, but from the
trampled root

New life demands its way where this had been.

Where now the splendid hope that drew it
straight and fair

Out of the dark chill earth, innocent, brave ?

There it creeps crookedly seeking to find its way

Fair still but pitiful, stricken earth's slave.

Who taught her right or wrong ? See there her
teacher grows—

Switch of the hazel tree, branch of the thorn.

Power of her father's arm full of wrath falling sore

Bruising the child's young soul tenderly born.

Madge Linsey from the well brought the deep
waters

Passed through her father's gate with a slow
smile.

Only two gazed at her, holding her tenderly,

Only two spoke of her kindly the while.

MADGE LINSEY

“There’s trouble brewing here,” said John the
gardener,

“Bitter black trouble, sure,” sighed he again,

“Oh, the sad tale of it, she like the wayside rose,
Would I could shield her grief, suffer her pain.”

“She goes her wayward path,” spoke Ben the
shoemaker,

“Lost soon her straying feet on life’s highway,

Would she were fair of soul as she so comely is
I would have called her mine. Now I but pray,”

.

Under the wings of night slept the small hamlet
still

Fanned by her pinions dark, weary of day,

Breathing her perfumed soft winds of sweet
clover bloom,

Meadow sweet, wild thyme, and newly-cut hay.

Never a light but one in all the homesteads
gleamed ;

Never a sound but one faint in the night,

Was it a maiden’s sigh, was it her weeping sore,
Or but low laughter all shallow and light ?

MADGE LINSEY

Open a casement flew and on the shadowed wall
Hands shook the passion flower nigh from her hold.
Then woke a frightened sheep at the noise full
 of fear,
Called to her little lamb safe in the fold.

Someone had crept through the deep of the
 meadow grass ;
Someone had gone through the gate and away ;
Only the screech owl alarmed her witch sister
 there,
Shook from her brown wings the dust of the day.

Never a howl from the watch-dog a-lying still
Close to his bed—was there naught to assail ?
Some friendly thought in his bright eyes were
 glancing sure
Kindly reproof with his slow wagging tail.

Then sent the night her chill hour before
 dawning came ;
Hushed all the village lay wrapped in its rest ;
Only the little clocks in each home counting quick
Knew of swift passing time, chimed to attest.

MADGE LINSEY

Soon chirped a bird in the elm by the smithy old,
Saw the East paling impatient for day ;
Then the red cock from the barn of Dan
 Linsey crew,
First he to welcome the dawn on his way.

Soon from the hamlet small, silence and slumber
 flew,
Smoke from each chimney came, loud voices
 shrilled,
Tramping of horses and jingle of harness chimed,
Lowling of cattle the morning hours filled.

Then the watch-dog in the yard at Dan Linsey's
 rose,
Stretched his sleek body and whined at the door,
Slunk from it sudden and ran to his kennel swift,
Hid in the darkness there grieving forlore.

Soon up the village street whispers went stealing
 by
"Madge Linsey's run from home in the darknight,
Keep from her father's path, he loud as thunder
 goes
Thong in hand seeking her, shaken and white."

MADGE LINSEY

Nine long days wonder grew, in cot and cabin
small,

Talk of her welcome as circus or fair;

Late homers soon were shrived on their con-
fessing there

“Heard news of Linsey’s lass at the ‘Grey
Mare.’”

Old foes grew friends again, loud in discussing it
“Is true that master’s son?”—“Hush, have a
care!—

She was a wanton sure, see her eyes glancing
light;

All game who came her way, devil may care!”

Tom Lee the innkeeper chuckled the live-long
day,

Threw tempting bits of news his guests among,
Not since the squire’s son came of age in the
spring

Had his ale flowed so free, or the coin rung.

Where hides the stricken beast, where falls the
wounded bird,

That the sharp tooth and claw seek not his state,

MADGE LINSEY

Tears out the feeble strength, plucks at the
broken wings,
So tossed on poisoned tongues Madge Linsey's fate.

Only two stood aside from all the gossiping,
Sighed for her dolefully, whispered their pain.
"Would God her love were mine," said John
the gardener

"In my heart would she rest safe without stain."

"She goes her shameful path," said Ben the
shoemaker,

"Once I did call her wife in the lone night,
Pure mother of my child, I in my dreaming
spoke

God knew and rescued me, kept my soul white,"

.

So went the slow year on putting the horse
to plough;

Hoeing the crops from weeds, tossing ripe hay.
Thatching the golden rick, drawing the earth
fruit home,

Few thought of Linsey's lass through the hard
day.

MADGE LINSEY

But Roy the postman's son driving one night
from town,
Into the "Grey Mare" strode calling for ale,
Sat with his pipe and glass glad of his consequence
Laughed at each leering face slow with his tale.

"Madge Linsey's left forlorn." "So did we
say 'twould be,"

"Would she come home again!" "not though
she dare!"

"Her father's arm was strong! wanton she
ever was,"

"Jeered long at Roy," he said, "devil may
care."

Only two softly spoke, said Ben the shoemaker
"So of our wilful sins pay we the toll,
Steep slopes the easy path, quick is the downward way,
Into hell hath she gone, God save her soul."

Then John the gardener rising a moment
stood

"After her little feet there shall I go!"

MADGE LINSEY

Into hell's mouth itself. She like the wayward
 rose,
I'll bring her soul to God white as the snow."

Only two went her way, stopped on the vortex
 brim,
From their slow country hours chilled in amaze,
Seeing this seething pool of frail humanity,
Crime, lust, and savagery, of city ways.

Here slipped the thief by night, there dragged
 the sloven by,
Now rose the drunkard's laugh, now his lewd
 song,
Here little children screamed, hurt by some
 wanton hand,
Dragged to destruction sure in the wild throng.

As the white faces passed, in whirling waters
 lost,
They met Madge Linsey's eyes heavy with
 woe ;
But on her reddened lips laughter for ever hung
Scorn of their sympathy stung like a blow.

MADGE LINSEY

“I dare not follow her,” said Ben the shoemaker,
“Lost is she ever now, evil her goal.”

Back to his home he went, prayed till he tranquil
was,
Calm in the village peace, saving his soul.

“I can but follow her,” said John the gardener,
Into the seething pool leaped from his place,
“Hold to me, sweet,” he cried, “soon will I
draw you forth,
Rest on my shoulder strong, your darling face.”

Madge Linsey at his call laughed on her wilful
way,
Lifting her brimming glass quaffed the red wine.
“Yet I shall draw you forth,” said John the
gardener
“If for your drowning soul I should lose mine.”

Into the whirling pool followed he after her,
Drank glass for glass with her, shared sin for sin,
Fought for her, slaved for her, went down to
hell for her.

There in its agonies strove he to win,

MADGE LINSEY

So went the slow years by, putting the horse to
plough
Hoeing the weeds from crop, tossing ripe hay,
Thatching the golden rick, drawing the ripe
fruits home,
Till with fair harvest came thanksgiving day.

Lone in the little church stood Ben the shoe-
maker,
Looked on the golden grain heaped by the rail.
Saw ripe fruit by the font and saw the wheaten
bread
Blush roses flushing red, lilies all pale.

Earth's timid offering laid by the altar stone,
In his hands bore he, too, gifts for the day ;
Down by the chancel he stood his ripe basket full,
Sighed deep and wearily kneeling to pray.

Thought of Dan Linsey's lass and John the
gardener,
Here did they kneel with him holy of brow,
What was the loss to her on this thanksgiving day !
What had his harvesting brought to him now ?

MADGE LINSEY

Sudden there came through the dark porch
approaching him

One who was gaunt of frame, weary, unslept.
In his arms bore he a burden all white and chill,
Up to the altar rails stealthily crept.

“Who comes here in such guise?” said Ben
the shoemaker

“Bright is the church to-day, hear the bells ring?”

“All that is left of me, once John the gardener.
I, too, the fruits of my harvest would bring.”

“What do you bear to your heart held so
piteously,

If it fair offering why do you mourn?”

“All that is left of her who was Dan Linsey’s
lass

She like the wayside rose broken and torn.”

Down at the altar stone he laid her tenderly
Folded her chill white hands, smoothed her hair,
“Here is my offering, here my good harvesting,
Lord! I have brought it thee, safe from the
snare.”

MADGE LINSEY

“To the depths have you gone,” said Ben the shoemaker,

“In the dark waters of sin you went down,
Kneel by me now and pray, pray for your pardoning,

So that your penitence weave you a crown.”

“Into the depths I went,” cried John the gardener,

“Drank glass for glass with her, shared sin for sin,
Fought for her, slaved for her, went into hell for her,

Pawned my own soul her faint spirit to win.”

“Now I but bear her up, up from the whirling pool

Over the brim of it to Heaven’s gate,
Hold to her, cling to her, ere I slip back again,
Pray for her wounded soul early and late.”

“Lost he is, wild he is,” said Ben the shoemaker,
“See how he runs apace from the church door,
Even as he were I, had my heart conquered me,
But the Lord aided my strength to restore.”

MADGE LINSEY

Then by Madge Linsey's side knelt he a little
while,

"So of our wilful sins pay we the toll.

Even as she were I, had I but followed her.

But the Lord succoured me saving my soul."

BUILD NO ROOF-TREE

BUILD no roof-tree over thee,
Raise nor wall nor rafter,
Like the swallows in the eaves,
Care will follow after.

Lend thy ear unto no voice
Save the linnet's singing,
Happy birds nor sigh nor weep
In their joyous winging.

Take for friend into thy heart
The little fox in hiding,
So thy love be not forgot,
Thy benefits abiding.

In the shadow of the glen
Lies thy happy laughter,
Build no roof-tree over thee,
Raise nor roof nor rafter.

THE SONG OF THE HAPPY MAN

I HAVE a rose garden
Full of sweet flowers ;
Yellow bloom, crimson bloom,
Perfume the hours.
I have an apple tree
Bent with its load ;
Ruddy fruit, golden fruit,
Hang to my hold.

I have a young maid's love,
Timid and shy.
All day I singing go,
"Happy man I!"
All night I prayerful go,
"Blessed man I."
Happy man, blessed man,
Happy man I !

THE LITTLE BELLS OF SEVILLA

THE ladies of Sevilla go forth to take the air,
They loop their lace mantillas, a red rose in
their hair ;

Upon the road Delicias* their little horses run,
And tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, the bells go every one.

Beside the Guadalquivir, by orange-scented way,
The ladies of Sevilla they come at cool of day ;
They wave their fans coquettish, their black eyes
gleam and glow,
And all their little carriage bells a-jingle, jingle,
go.

There, too, the caballeros drive in the perfumed
breeze,
Upon the road Delicias among the flowering
trees ;

* The Paseo de las Delicias is the favourite promenade of the people of Seville.

THE LITTLE BELLS OF SEVILLA

Beneath their brown sombreros their dark eyes
 flame and flash,
And all their little horses' bells right merrily
 they crash.

Beside the Guadalquivir the hours are very fair,
The nightingale is tuning upon the scented air ;
Oh, laughing Andalusia, beloved of the sun,
Your merry, merry little bells, they call me every
 one.

TO DONNEEN

WHEN first you came to London Town, Donneen,
Just five years old,
I said—"He'll ask for marble halls, and streets
All paved with gold!"

I thought—"He'll weep, so stricken with amaze,
To hear the roar
Of trampling hoofs, of rushing feet that go
Our way before."

I said—"He'll fear the throbbing engine's shriek,
The shaking path,
The pushing crowd, the city's comrade cries
Of joy, of wrath,"

And when we stood to hear the mighty heart
Of London Town,
I saw your angry cheek and knew a tear
Had threatened down.

TO DONNEEN

“Why weep,” I whispered by your red gold
head,

“Dearest of boys?”

“*I cannot hear my new shoes creak,*” you said,

“*There is such noise.*”

.

Oh, creak, dear shoes, above the city's roar ;

Be heard, be seen,

So hearts grow glad, hands clap, and voices cry,

“Here comes Donneen !”

THE THREE FATES

UP in the cave of the wind,
All bent and crabbed with their years,
In endless chatter they sit,
Old Distaff, Spindle, and Shears.

And they caught a mother's song
Going by them on the breeze,
As she hushed her pretty babe
To sweet slumber on her knees.

“Oh, you shall be great and proud,
And you shall be strong and fleet,
For fame to your call will come,
And captive Love to your feet.

“And life for you shall be long,
All full of your heart's desire”—
She sang as she rocked her babe
To sleep by the golden fire.

THE THREE FATES

Up in the cave of the wind
Bent with their difficult years
In mocking laughter they sit,
Old Distaff, Spindle, and Shears.

THE WEST WIND

THE wind that blows from the west
Taps at my window, sighing ;
But I pull the curtains close,
I'll hear no more its crying.

Oh, the north wind, it is good !
I run to meet it singing.
And the south hath summer's breath,
Like to a censor swinging.

And the east is as a voice
That calls me from my sleeping.
The wind that comes from the west,
It fills my heart with weeping.

There is salt upon its mouth,
It is full of ghostly laughter,
And dim shades and shadows come
To call by roof and rafter.

THE WEST WIND

From the far-off hills it blows,
It is full of phantom sighing ;
Where lost dear voices speak,
To hurt me with their crying.

Then blow, sweet breath of the south,
Blow for my good to-morrow,
The wind that comes from the west,
Brings to my heart but sorrow.

SPRING AND AUTUMN

THE apple blossom from the bough is falling
In sunshine hours, the long young days of
summer,
The parent birds from branch to branch are
calling,
To cheer the flight of each beloved new-comer.

The woods awake, their winter sleep is ended,
The lark springs high from meadows deep and
sunny,
The earth's astir with hopes anew and splendid,
And I—what shall I do without my honey?

The young blood sings, the young feet dance in
going,
For youth is glad, and joy would mate with
laughter;
They were for him, her sweet years' tender
glowing,
And not for me to house 'neath roof and rafter.

SPRING AND AUTUMN

The empty nest hangs on the bough forsaken,
Youth flies from age and all that's dull and
dreary ;
The old branch breaks, the withered leaf is
shaken,
And I—what shall I do without my dearie ?

And as I pause on life's path long and winding,
The young pass on with voices glad and golden,
And show me there the marvels they are finding.
So new to them, alas, to me so olden !

As lone I wait, all weary of my going,
Beside the church, with garden green and
sunny,
Where sleep my dead, hushed by the soft winds
blowing,
I hear a voice that calls, "Come to us,
honey !"

THE TWO LAWS

HE was the son of a hunting squire
And heir to a fair estate,
And she but an humble serving maid
Who opened his father's gate.

He thought her sweet as the garden rose
He wore in his coat each day.
She took for her kiss the broken flower
He flung as he passed her way.

He smiled to see on the shy young cheek
The lamp of her love aglow,
She held the shrine of his laughing eyes
The God that she best did know.

Oh ! but the song of the spring is sweet
When the sap flows high in the tree.
And what will it bring for you, my dear,
And what will it bring for me ?

THE TWO LAWS

He rode him far on the winding road
In search of an ancient lore,
She crouched till dawn in the midnight streets
Thrust out from her father's door.

He wed a lady of high degree,
No fairer was ever seen.
Her bridegroom gave her a narrow bed
With a coverlet all in green.

He raised for his kiss the new-born son
He held in his strong arms' hold.
She had no smile for the little babe
Who lay by her side so cold.

Oh ! but the song of the storm is loud
In the winter shrouded tree.
And what has it brought for you, my dear,
And what has it brought for me ?

THE RED ROSE

THE little red rose tapped at my window—
Tapped at my window long years ago ;
Glad would I run then, trip to the shadow,
Who was in hiding well did I know.

Last night I, nodding, heard at the casement
Soft knock-a-knocking come on the pane.
“ Hush ! ’Tis the lost rose taps at my window—
Red rose, oh, sweet rose, come back again ! ”

Listless I moved then, laughed at my fancies—
Wept at my fancies of years ago.
Slow went a-seeking who was in hiding,
Who came a-tapping—how should I know ?

Pushed wide the window, leaned to the silence—
“ Red rose, oh, sweet rose, come back again ! ”
’Twas but a dead branch, broken and brown
 branch,
Soft knock-a-knocking there on the pane.

THE NAMELESS ONE

LAST night a hand pushed on the door
And tirmed at the pin.
I turned my face unto the wall,
And could not cry, "Come in!"
I dared not cry, "Come in!"

Last night a voice wailed round the house
And called my name upon,
And bitter, bitter did it mourn :
"Where is my mother gone?
Where is my mother gone?"

"From saintly arms I slipped and flew
Adown the moon-lit skies,
I weary of the paths of Heav'n
And flowers of Paradise—
Sweet scents of Paradise !

THE NAMELESS ONE

“For little children prattle there,
And whisper all the day
Of lovely mothers on the earth,
Where once they used to play,
Who used with them to play.

“They linger laughing by the door,
And wait the threshold on ;
I have no memory so fair,
Where is my mother gone ?
Where is my mother gone ? ”

Thrice pushed the hand upon the door
And tirmed at the pin.
I turned my face unto the wall,
And could not cry, “Come in ! ”
I dared not cry, “Come in ! ”

THE SEA HOUNDS

“ THERE’s a hound at the door, Shawn O’Farrell,
There’s a hound at the door.

If you take down the bar or the shutter,
I shall see you no more,
I shall see you no more !”

“ Oh, it is but the sea that is loosing
The white dogs of its spray.
Take your gentle young arms from about me,
For I must on my way.”

“ But they whine at the window, O’Farrell,
How they sniff at the pane !”

“ Oh, it is but the wind in its passing,
The wild wind and the rain.”

“ How they keen in their waiting, O’Farrell,
So I hold you, afraid.”

“ ’Tis some soul that’s nigh lost in the tempest
Who so calls for my aid.”

THE SEA HOUNDS

“It’s a witch of the waters, O’Farrell,
All sea-cold and wave-white,
With her hounds that will fawn till you follow
To your death in the night.”

He has opened the door, Shawn O’Farrell,
And gone forth to the dark ;
The wild hounds by his heel race and quarrel,
How they leap and they bark !

He has launched his frail boat on the waters—
He has pushed from the shore !
Pray, oh, pray for the soul of O’Farrell,
He shall come back no more.
“Shawn O’Farrell, O’Farrell, O’Farrell,
I shall see you no more !” .

THE SEA MAIDEN

I DREW her out of the wave
High up on the windy shore.
Oh, never a fish I caught
So fair in my net before.

And white she was as the foam
That flies from the storm-whipped
 sea ;
I held her close to my heart,
Where at rest she would not be.

Swift she turned her east and west,
Slow she turned her north and south ;
The salt from her weed-brown hair
Stung bitter upon my mouth.

I drew her close to my heart,
And I kissed her wave-wet cheek ;
Till fear went out of her eyes
At the love my lips did speak.

THE SEA MAIDEN

And soon, for a hedge-grove flower
She followed me by the hill,
Where call of the sea was lost,
And fall of the wave was still.

And long in my garden fair
She laughed in her strange delight
At swaying of roses red,
At perfume of lilies white.

I clad her in robes of silk,
I shod her in shoon of gold ;
And jewel and gem I found
For her slender hands to hold,

Full many a priceless gift
That my nets had brought to me,
From grasp of the restless dead
Who move in deep of the sea.

And I sung to make her glad,
And I laughed to see her play,
As I shook my nets in the sun
All out in the golden day.

THE SEA MAIDEN

BUT alack ! for joy too brief,
There rolled and tinkling fell,
From twist and twine of the net
A knarled and curséd shell.

She held it high in her hand ;
I knew she was lost to me.
She laid her lips to its pearl
And heard the call of the sea.

She heard the cry of the sea :
And she thrust me from her
 side
And out to its cold embrace
She flew like a willing bride.

And I heard the laugh of the
 wave
Far off on the windy shore.
Oh ! never a dream I caught
So fair in my net before.

THE SPIES

YOUNG Robin from the field in the deep shadow
runs,
Singing boy, pretty maid tossing the hay, he
shuns,
Light of feet, stealthily, to the wood soon he
creeps,
Laughing at strategy, there he runs, there he
leaps.
But the thrush mid the green
Calls from her swaying tree,
"There he goes, there he goes,
Did you see ! did you see !"

May, in the deep of fern dreaming the summer
day,
Hears the swift coming feet that would brook
no delay,
Springs from her mossy couch, kneels by a
streamlet there,
Bathes her sweet flushing face, binds back her
rebel hair,

THE SPIES

“Tch,” says the blackbird, “Tch.”

But the thrush on her tree

Sings “’Tis but true love this,

It is not vanity.”

Hush, does she know who comes, hiding her
joyful eyes,

Bidding her guess his name, laughing at her
surprise,

Chiding her wayward word, jealous of her slow
wit,

That could not find his name, and softly
whisper it?

“Sweet,” said the chaffinch, “Sweet!”

And the thrush on the tree

Sings “Oh you happy maid,

It is he! it is he!”

Scant of breath May replies, “List how the
young bird sings

And in the blue I see flutter a brown lark’s
wings.”

But Robin laughing says, “Busy in their own way
Birds never heed of us, hearken to me I pray.”

THE SPIES

Loud the thrush on the tree
To the lark curious cries
“See if their wedlock be
Noted in Paradise !”

Joyfully goes the lark soaring to Peter's Gate,
Peeps at the record there of passing human fate.
Sings, till the Saint forgives, all the late news of
earth,
Hearing of that far land where once he hath his
birth.

Then from the sunset skies
Slips to the meadow's shade,
Calling “'Tis true, 'tis true !
Marriage in Heaven made.”

THE SISTER

WHAT is balm for a soul distressed, O ! sailor
tell to me ?

“ A good ship in a fighting wind glad of an
angry sea.

The leaping timbers 'neath your feet, the salt
upon your cheek,

Never soul could mourn, my sister, O ! never
heart could break.”

What is joy for a stricken heart, O ! hunter tell
me true ?

“ A brave horse speeding o'er the plain beneath
a sky storm blue.

The splendid life against your knee, the wind's
hand in your hair,

Never heart could grieve, my sister, O ! never
soul despair.”

What is good for a soul outworn, O ! soldier
tell to me ?

“ A bright sword in your eager hand, a coming
foe to see.

THE SISTER

When steel to steel breaks into song, and all the
world is red,
How could hope be lost, my sister, how could
joy be dead ? ”

I am woman born, my brother, such deeds are
not for me.

“ Then seek some solitary place beneath a cyprus
tree,

And dig a grave both wide and long, O ! dig it
wide and deep

To hold a woman's restless heart 'and hush her
soul to sleep.”

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